

The Defence of the Faith

A RATIONALIST ON RATIONALISM.

Amiel, brilliant but inclined to the rationalistic viewpoint, in his *Journal*, page 78, writes:

"I heard a sermon this morning, good but insufficient. Why was I not edified? Because Christianity from the rationalistic point of view is a Christianity of dignity not of humility. Holiness and mysticism evaporate; the specifically Christian accent is wanting. My impression is always the same, faith is made a dull, poor thing by these attempts in the pulpit or elsewhere to reduce it to a simple moral psychology. The simple folk will say, 'They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him'; and they have a right to say it, and I repeat it with them."

THE BEST METHOD OF UNDERSTANDING TRUTH.

By D. J. Fleming.

The scientific method is undoubtedly congenial to the modern mind. The results of this method, however, have sometimes destroyed, after bitter struggle, various religious beliefs; and therefore in some minds a feeling has arisen that science and religion are necessarily enemies. The following thoughts, however, are given with the firm conviction that a young man not only can, but must, deal with the great questions of his religious life in a scientific spirit.

Every one now recognizes that a student makes much better progress by handling materials and doing things, than by merely reading about them. Every university in India is insisting, as never before, on well-equipped laboratories; and in most of the provinces, every student of science has to do more or less practical work. Teachers are convinced that a student cannot understand specific heat until he has weighed out some metal, and by the use of thermometer and calorimeter has found it for himself. They feel that he cannot know hydrogen from the pages of a book, but must actually discover its properties himself. This "laboratory method" has been applied not only to physics, chemistry and biology, as in our Indian universities, but also, in some advanced places in England and America, to mathematics, to psychology and to sociology. In short, we have discovered that we learn best by doing, and that we know best those things which we have actually discovered in our own experience.

The question now naturally arises, Is there a place for the method of learning by doing in our religious life? Let us suppose, for instance, that we wish to understand the kind of life that Jesus lived while he was on the earth. That life is described in our Christian books; but the man who merely reads will never realize what that life is. Here it is most certainly true that doing is necessary to understanding and believing. For Christ talks of self-sacrificing love, of forgiveness, of self-forgetful service. But these things can

no more be known from the letters of a printed page, than can the properties of an electric current. If we would understand God's love, we ourselves must try to love; if we wish to learn the full meaning of forgiveness, we ourselves must forgive. Every disappointing friend or disobedient servant furnishes a natural laboratory where the deep significance of love and forgiveness can be discovered.

Many men say that when they know, they will act; Jesus says that if they act, they will know. He knows that light will come through doing, and not through dreaming. No one can have a true idea of right until he has done it, and reverence for a truth comes only when its meaning has been made definite in experience at some cost. In other words, experience makes both understanding and appreciation possible. It is vital, therefore, that we put present belief into action, in order that belief may grow; for in this way alone do we furnish ourselves with that deepening experience which can lead to greater truth. Mighty convictions are born from truth lived out.

But in a far more thorough-going way men are coming to believe that truth that is merely intellectually conceived has no meaning for us; that abstract truth is almost useless; and that truth acquires value only as it is actually lived out in experience. Most people, for instance, would hesitate to say just what electricity is; what they do know, however, is what electricity can do. In fact, people get their whole conception of the meaning of the word "electricity" from experimenting with it. Our clearest ideas of it are connected with what it is capable of doing. Beliefs about it are beliefs to be acted on. Apart from its actual manifestations in experience, electricity has little meaning for any one. So with gravity, light, radium and many other things in science. There is not one of these things that we really understand. We know only that they act on us in certain ways; and these ways in which they affect us in experience are all the truth we know about them. Yet we accept this truth and use these things accordingly.

So I accept Christ. So I accept the mystery of the cross. I do not wholly understand them, but their practical effects I can perceive. In proportion as I abide in Christ, and let the fact of his life sink in upon me, I find results—results in the realm of character, where alone true salvation lies. Thus not by the way of philosophy, nor by the way of reasoning, but by the actual test in experience do I approach him as my Savior.

This understanding of Christ as a practical Savior is deepened as one uses him in relation to all the larger needs about one. My heart goes out in loyalty to him as I see the way he meets these larger problems, the remedies he is actually inspiring, and the efforts toward social service that spring naturally from his spirit. Not only to me, but to my family, to my nation, and to the world, Christ has a practical saving and redeeming use. Judging after using him, and with scientific loyalty to facts and willingness to take them into consideration, I find the meaning of Christ to be—Savior. Christ's significance lies in Christ's power, and one understands him as one uses him.—The Bible Record.